

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 AID-05 /068 W

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R 161303Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3917

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PN

SUBJ : VICE PRESIDENT REPLIES TO CONEP LETTER

REF: PANAMA 2769

SUMMARY: IN A MEASURED RESPONSE TO CONCEP PRESIDENT CUCALON'S LETTER (REFTEL), VICE PRESIDENT SUCRE HAS ASSURED BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT GOP HAS PROVIDED AND WILL CONTINUE TO GUARANTEE POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR PRIVATE ENTERPRISE. SUCH A CLIMATE, HE ASSERTED, HAD BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BY THE GOP MEASURES TO PROTECT THE HUMBLE AND FOSTER THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE. SUCRE CLARIFIED THAT CONSTITUTIONAL CONSULTATION PROVISIONS DO NOT PROVIDE INTERESTED PARTIES "PLEBISCITE" POWERS OVER LEGISLATION; REMINDED THAT GOP HAS CONSULTED WITH CITIZENRY MORE THAN ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT; DENIED ALLEGATION THAT THERE IS DIVISION WITHIN GOP; AND LAMENTED THAT CONEP HAD TAKEN SUCH A POSITION DURING ONGOING TREATY NEGOTIATION AND HINTED OF COMPLICITY WITH ZONIANS. END SUMMARY.

1. VICE PRESIDENT ARTURO SUCRE, IN A LETTER PUBLISHED AS EDITORIAL IN MAY 15 MATUTINO, HAS RESPONDED CALMLY BUT FIRMLY TO RECENT LETTER (REFTEL) FROM NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE (CONEP)

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PRESIDENT RICARDO CUCALON. THE VICE PRESIDENT'S REPLY,

DATED MAY 14, WAS PRINTED IN FULL WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY.

2. OBSERVING THAT HE WOULD PASS OVER THE CONEP LETTER'S "SUSPICIOUS ACCUSATIONS AND ILL-INTENTIONED INSINUATIONS" REGARDING GOVERNMENT POLICY, SUCRE STATED HE WISHED TO CLARIFY SOME BASIC CONCEPTS. ADDRESSING FIRST THE ALLEGATION THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAD NOT BEEN PROPERLY CONSULTED ON VARIOUS LEGISLATION, THE VICE PRESIDENT NOTED THAT THIS REVEALED A MISUNDERSTANDING -- OR DESIRE NOT TO UNDERSTAND -- THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS ON CONSULTATION. ACCORDING TO SUCRE, CONSULATION IS NOT REQUIRED FOR ALL LEGISLATION BUT ONLY WHEN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BELIEVES IT IS NECESSARY IN THE INTERESTS OF THE MAJORITY. AFFIRMING THAT THE GOP CONSULTED MORE THAN ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT, SUCRE STATED THAT SOME PEOPLE STILL APPEARED TO HAVE THE ERRONEOUS IMPRESSION THAT THE CONSULTATION PROCESS CONSTITUTED A FORM OF "PLEBISCITE" AND THAT FINAL LEGISLATION MUST REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THOSE CONSULTED. SUCH A SYSTEM WOULD BE IMPRACTICAL, SAID SUCRE, ESPECIALLY IN A COUNTRY THAT NEEDS RAPID AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO ITS PROBLEMS. WHILE THE GOP TAKES ALL SECTORAL INTERESTS INTO CONSIDERATION, THE FINAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS RESTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND NOT WITH PRESSURE GROUPS.

3. TURNING TO CONEP LETTER'S ASSERTION THAT "CERTAIN GROUPS" WITHIN THE GOP WERE WORKING AGAINST PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, SUCRE DENIED THAT THERE WAS DIVISION ON GOVERNMENT TEAM OR THAT PRIVATE SECTOR HAD ANYTHING TO FEAR FROM GOP. THE GOVERNMENT IS UNITED BEHIND TORRIJOS, SHARES COMMON OBJECTIVES AND IDEALS, AND WORKS TOGETHER FOR THE ENTIRE NATION AND, ABOVE ALL, FOR THE DISADVANTAGED SECTORS. ASSURING CUCALON THAT THERE IS NO BASIS FOR INVESTOR PREOCCUPATION OVER THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, SUCRE STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE PROVIDING BUSINESSMEN "THE GUARANTEES AND SOCIAL PEACE THAT PERMITS THEM TO INVEST AND PRODUCE IN A CLIMATE OF STABILITY AND TRANQUILITY." THIS CLIMATE, SAID THE VICE PRESIDENT, HAD BEEN MADE POSSIBLE ONLY BECAUSE OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION

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IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE INTRODUCTION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MEASURES PROTECTIVE OF THE HUMBLE CLASSES, AND A FOREIGN POLICY CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLITICAL AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRATION.

4. ENDING WITH A CAREFULLY WORDED WARNING, SUCRE LAMENTED "AS A PANAMANIAN" THAT CONEP HAD TAKEN SUCH A POSITION WHEN THE GOP WAS ENGAGED IN MAJOR EFFORT TO

ELIMINATE THE "COLONIAL ENCLAVE." "IT HURTS, MR. CUCALON," SUCRE STATED, "TO CONFUSE THE VOICE OF A PANAMANIAN, IN ITS CONTENT AND OPPORTUNISM, WITH THAT OF SOME NORTH AMERICAN CANAL ZONE RESIDENTS THAT DO NOT ADMIT THE JUSTICE IMPLICIT IN THE RESCUE OF PANAMANIAN SOVEREIGNTY AND JURISDICTION OVER ALL ITS TERRITORY."

5. COMMENT: THE SUCRE RESPONSE REFLECTS ONE OF THE BASIC TENANTS OF TORRIJOS' REVOLUTION: THAT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANQUILITY ARE ONLY POSSIBLE IF THE PEASANTS AND WORKERS ARE FULLY INTEGRATED INTO NATIONAL LIFE AND ARE GIVEN THE FEELING THAT THEIR INTERESTS ARE BEING PROTECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT. SUCRE'S LETTER, MODERATE BUT FIRM, CONSTITUTES THE OFFICIAL GOP REPLY TO THE CUCALON LETTER. BY PLEDGING TO MAINTAIN FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR PRIVATE ENTERPRISE THE GOP UNDOUBTEDLY HOPES TO DAMPEN CHARGES THAT "UNCERTAINTY" PRECLUDES PRIVATE SECTION INVESTMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, IT ASSURES ITS CONSTITUENTS THAT ITS INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS WILL NOT ALLOW BUSINESSMEN TO "VETO" SOCIAL AND CONOMIC LEGISLATION WITH WHICH THEY DISAGREE. SUCRE'S QUASI DENIAL THAT SOME GROUPS IN THE GOP ARE ANTI-PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, HOWEVER, WILL NOT CONVINCE THE CONSERVATIVES WHO ACCURATELY SEE THAT A MINORITY FACTION IN THE GOP WOULD LIKE TO SEE PANAMA MOVE LEFTWARD.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTES, PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, PUBLICATIONS, ALLEGATIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PANAMA02877
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750173-0784
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750545/aaaabogb.tel
Line Count: 141
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 PANAMA 2769
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 SEP 2003 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <16 OCT 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: : VICE PRESIDENT REPLIES TO CONEP LETTER
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PN, CONEP, (SUCRE, ARTURO), (CUCALON, RICARDO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006